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POEMS OF PATRIOTISM AND THE LESSONS THEY TEACH

V. THOU MOTHER WITH THY EQUAL BROOD

By WALT WHITMAN

THE AUTHOR AND HIS WORK

Walt Whitman was born at West Hills, Long Island, in 1819. He was educated in the public schools of Brooklyn and New York. He had a very varied career. At one time and another he was apprenticed to a doctor, a lawyer, and a printer. He taught school for a while; was a carpenter and builder; began early to write articles for the newspapers; took an active part in politics and achieved local fame as a political speaker. In 1846 he became editor of the *Brooklyn Eagle*. He made long long walking tours (1847-1848) over the United States and into Canada. While serving as a Federal soldier in the Civil War he contracted malarial fever which undermined his health for life. He was given a position in the Interior Department at Washington from which he was later dismissed because of his "Leaves of Grass." He was an ardent advocate of the Free Soil Party, and some of his sentiments and opinions were objectionable to the party in power. Later he was given a clerkship in the Treasury Department which he was obliged to give up in 1874 on account of paralysis. He then moved to Camden, N. J., where his brother George lived. Here he lived until his death in 1892.

Whitman published his first volume, "Leaves of Grass," in 1855. The first edition made a very small book; in succeeding editions other poems were added until it was expanded into a large volume. At first Whitman was accused of indecency and immorality for speaking so plainly about some subjects that were not regarded as proper for public discussion. His book was placed under ban in Massachusetts in 1881. Whitman was so original and so independent in his habits of thought and in his writings that he utterly disregarded the conventional laws of rhyme and feet and wrote in rhythmic sentences of varying length. This very fact, coupled with the accusation of immorality that was brought against him, made it exceedingly difficult for him to get a fair hearing before the public. (Many still regard him as a freak.) But when Emerson challenged his cause as an original and gifted thinker and writer, his popularity began to increase, until today he is regarded by literary men as perhaps the most original genius among American men of letters. He wrote many other volumes in addition to the one here mentioned. For a list of his writings and for a more extended short sketch of the author, the reader is referred to an excellent article in the "International Encyclopedia" which can be found in the libraries of most of our best high schools.

It should be added, that Whitman is not the kind of writer that high school pupils will at first appreciate. But any thoughtful pupil who will study the poem here reproduced until its deeper meaning dawns upon him, until he feels himself caught in the magnificent sweep of the poet's vision, will have his sense of patriotism quickened and his enthusiasm for his country aroused to a higher pitch and elevated to saner level.

It does not matter now that the author possessed such intense individualism, was so wilfully erratic and unconventional, since he has given us what is perhaps the greatest poem of patriotism—of democracy—to be found in the whole realm of American literature. In his preface to "Leaves of Grass" he said: "These United States themselves are essen-

tially the greatest poem." He was confident in the faith that his country's glory is to be spiritual and heroic. He is indeed our poet of democracy; and as such, we must study him. He has sketched with a bold hand—and with supreme confidence in his country's greatness—her possibilities and her prospective achievements in science, art, literature, industry, morality, government; and he looked upon them all as the logical outcome of the ideals on which our government is based.

A STUDY OF THE POEM

The title that the author originally gave this poem was, "As a Strong Bird on Pinions Free." He later changed the title to "Thou Mother with Thy Equal Brood." In your judgment does this title fit the poem better? Why?

The poem was written for the commencement exercises of Dartmouth College in 1872. Do you think it would have been as appropriate in 1862? In 1892? In 1919? Why? If the poet were living today, do you think he might add anything to it that would improve it? Do you suppose there are any lines in it he would want to leave out?

What are some of the "storms" our Nation has encountered since the poem was written? What are some of the political, social and spiritual "diseases" with which this Nation has since been afflicted since 1872? How has our national life been affected by these storms? Diseases? On the whole, would you say the poet's faith in democracy as a form of government has been justified by the way the Nation has weathered the storms it has encountered since 1872? By the manner it has combatted the diseases that have afflicted it? Do you think the Union has been strengthened or weakened by them? How?

What are some of the Nation's significant achievements since 1872 in science and invention? Art? Literature? Would you say the poet's prophecy has found reasonable fulfillment up to this time? Do you suppose there are as great, or greater, constructive tasks still ahead of us? Scan the world's horizon today and say whether or not there are in prospect other "storms" brewing? Is your faith in the Nation's ability safely to weather them as great as the poet's? Do you think our faith in ourselves—in our government—has helped us to weather the storms in the past? Will this faith be a necessary quality of our citizenship in the future?

Look now for a moment more closely at our national issues and say whether or not there are "diseases" of a political, social, spiritual, or political (not partisan) kind that still afflict us? What are they? What is the citizen's part in helping the Nation to combat them? Will the citizens of tomorrow have as great opportunities, do you suppose, to promote the Nation's welfare as those of yesterday had? Do you suppose they will measure up to their opportunities as successfully and as heroically as did the citizens of yesterday? Did the poet have any doubt on this point? Will they—can they—measure up to the opportunities of the future if they lack faith in our form of government? Faith in themselves?

In what ways can the education of citizens contribute to the Nation's greatness and prosperity? Does the poem suggest an answer? Can American achievement of the future be as great if the boys and girls of today are not educated, not trained, when they take their places in the busy world of tomorrow? Looking at the poem in this light, does it have a greater meaning for you personally? Do you think that if any child in America today does not have an opportunity to develop his talents to their fullest, the community in which he makes his home—the State—the Nation—will, in the meas-

ure that he fails, suffer because of it? Would you say, then, that it is the patriotic duty of every community and every State to give its boys and girls an opportunity through training to "burgeon out" all there is within them? Would you say it is the patriotic duty of every boy and girl in America to fit themselves through education for the largest possible patriotic service?—N. W. W.

THOU MOTHER WITH THY EQUAL BROOD*

Thou Mother with thy equal brood,
Thou varied chain of different States, yet one identity only,
A special song before I go I'd sing o'er all the rest,
For thee, the future.

I'd sow a seed for thee of endless Nationality,
I'd fashion thy ensemble including body and soul,
I'd show away ahead thy real Union, and how it may be
accomplish'd.

The paths to the house I seek to make,
But leave to those to come the house itself.

Belief I sing, and preparation;
As Life and Nature are not great with reference to the present only,
But greater still from what is yet to come,
Out of that formula for thee I sing.

2

As a strong bird on pinions free,
Joyous, the amplest spaces heavenward cleaving,
Such be the thought I'd think of thee America,
Such be the recitative I'd bring for thee.

The conceits of the poets of other lands I'd bring thee not,
Nor the compliments that have served their turn so long,
Nor rhyme, nor the classics, not perfume of foreign court
or indoor library;
But an odour I'd bring as from forests of pine in Maine, or
breath of an Illinois prairie,
With open airs of Virginia or Georgia or Tennessee, or from
Texas uplands, or Florida's glades,
Or the Saguenay's black stream, or the wide blue spread of
Huron,
With presentment of Yellowstone's scenes, or Yosemite,
And murmuring under, pervading all, I'd bring the rustling
sea-sound,
That endlessly sounds from the two Great Seas of the world.

And for thy subtler sense subtler refrains dread Mother,
Preludes of intellect tallying these and thee, mind-formulas
fitted for thee, real and sane and large as these and thee,
Thou! mounting, higher, divining deeper than we knew, thou
transcendental Union!
By thee fact be justified, blended with thought,
Thought of man justified, blended with God,
Thought thy idea, lo, the immortal reality!
Through thy reality, lo, the immortal idea!

3

Brain of the New World, what a task is thine,
To formulate the Modern—out of the peerless grandeur of
the modern,

* Reproduced from "The Patriotic Poems of Walt Whitman" (\$1.25 net). Published by Doubleday, Page & Company, Garden City, New York.

Out of thyself, comprising science, to recast poems, churches,
art
(Recast, maybe discard them, and them—maybe their work
is done, who knows?),
By vision, hand, conception, on the background of the mighty
past, the dead,
To him with absolute faith the mighty living present.

And yet thou living present brain, heir of the dead, the Old
World brain,
Thou that lay folded like an unborn babe within its folds so
long,
Thou carefully prepared by it so long—haply thou but un-
folded it, only maturest it,
It to eventuate in thee—the essence of the bygone time
contain'd in thee,
Its poems, churches, arts, unwitting to themselves, destined
with reference to thee;
Thou but the apples, long, long, long a-growing,
The fruit of all the Old ripening today in thee.

4

Sail, sail thy best, ship of Democracy,
Of value is thy freight, 'tis not the Present only,
The Past is also stored in thee,
Thou holdest not the venture of thyself alone, not of the
Western continent alone,
Earth's *résumé* entire floats on thy keel O ship, is steadied
by thy spars,
With thee Time voyages in trust, the antecedent nations sink
or swim with thee,
With all their ancient struggles, martyrs, heroes, epics, wars,
thou bear'st the other continents,
Theirs, theirs as much as thine, the destination—port trium-
phant;
Steer then with good strong hand and wary eye O helmsman,
thou carriest great companions,
Venerable priestly Asia sails this day with thee,
And royal feudal Europe sails with thee.
Beautiful world of new superber birth that rises to my eyes,
Like a limitless golden cloud filling the western sky,
Emblem of general maternity lifted above all,
Sacred shape of the bearer of daughters and sons,
Out of thy teeming womb thy giant babes in ceaseless pro-
cession issuing,
Acceding from such gestation, taking and giving continual
strength and life,
World of the real—world of the twain in one,
World of the soul, born by the world of the real alone, led to
identity, body, by it alone,
Yet in beginning only, incalculable masses of composite prec-
ious materials,
By history's cycles forwarded, by every nation, language,
hither sent,
Ready, collected here, a freer, vast, electric world, to be con-
structed here
The true New World, the world of orbic science, morals, lit-
eratures to come),
Thou wonder world yet undefined, unform'd, neither do I de-
fine thee,
How can I pierce the impenetrable blank of the future?
I feel thy omnious greatness evil as well as good,
I watch thee advancing, absorbing the present, transcending
the past,

I see thy light lighting, and thy shadow shadowing, as if the entire globe,
 But I do not undertake to define thee, hardly to comprehend thee,
 I but thee name, thee prophesy, as now,
 I merely thee ejaculate!
 Thee in thy future,
 Thee in thy only permanent life, career, thy own unloosen'd mind, thy soaring spirit,
 Thee as another equally needed sun, radiant, ablaze, swift-moving, fructifying all,
 Thee risen in potent cheerfulness and joy, in endless great hilarity,
 Scattering for good the cloud that hung so long, that weigh'd so long upon the mind of man,
 The doubt, suspicion, dread, of gradual, certain decadence of man;
 Thee in thy larger, saner brood of female, male—thee in thy athletes, moral, spiritual, South, North, West, East,
 (To thy immortal breasts, Mother of All, thy every daughter, son, endear'd alike, forever equal),
 Thee in thy own musicians, singers, artists, unborn yet, but certain,
 Thee in thy moral wealth and civilization (until which thy proudest material civilization must remain in vain),
 Thee in thy all-supplying, all-enclosing worship—thee in no single bible, Savior, merely,
 Thy Saviours countless, latent within thyself, thy bibles incessant within thyself, equal to any, divine as any
 (Thy soaring course thee formulating, not in thy two great wars, nor in thy century's visible growth
 But far more in these leaves and chants, thy chants, great Mother!),
 Thee in an education grown of thee, in teachers, studies, students, born of thee,
 Thee in thy democratic fêtes en-masse, thy high original festivals, operas, lecturers, preachers,
 Thee in thy ultimata (the preparation only now completed, the edifice on sure foundations tied),
 Thee in thy pinnacles, intellect, thought, thy topmost rational joys, thy love and godlike aspiration,
 In thy resplendent coming literati, thy full-lung'd orators, thy sacerdotal bards, kosmic savans,
 These! these in thee (certain to come), to-day I prophesy.

6

Land tolerating all, accepting all, not for the good alone, all good for thee,
 Land in the realms of God to be a realm unto thyself,
 Under the rule of God to be a rule unto thyself.

(Lo, where arise three peerless stars,
 To be thy natal stars my country, Ensemble, Evolution, Freedom,
 Set in the sky of Law).

Land of unprecedented faith, God's faith,
 Thy soil, thy very subsoil, all upheav'd,
 The general inner earth so long so sedulously draped over,
 now hence for what it is boldly laid bare,
 Open'd by thee to heaven's light for benefit or bale.

Not for success alone,
 Not to fair-sail unintermitted always,

The storm shall dash thy face, the murk of war and worse than war shall cover thee all over
 (Wert capable of war, its tugs and trials? be capable of peace, its trials,
 For the tug and mortal strain of nations come at last in prosperous peace, not war);
 In many a smiling mask death shall approach beguiling thee, thou in disease shall swelter,
 The livid cancer spread its hideous claws, clinging upon thy breasts, seeking to strike thee deep within,
 Consumption of the worst, moral consumption, shall rouge thy face with hectic,
 But thou shalt face thy fortunes, thy diseases, and surmount them all,
 Whatever they are to-day and whatever through time they may be,
 They each and all shall lift and pass away and cease from thee,
 While thou, Time's spirals rounding, out of thyself, thyself still extricating, fusing,
 Equable, natural, mysical Union thou (the mortal with immortal blent),
 Shalt soar toward the fulfilment of the future, the spirit of the body and the mind,
 The soul, its destinies.

The soul, its destinies, the real real
 (Purport of all these apparitions of the real);
 In thee America, the soul, its destinies,
 Thou globe of globes! thou wonder nebulous!
 By many a throe of heat and cold convuls'd (by these thyself solidifying),
 Thou mental, moral orb—thou New, indeed new,
 Spiritual World!
 The Present holds thee not—for such vast growth as thine,
 For such unparallel'd flight as thine, such brood as thine,
 The FUTURE only holds thee and can hold thee.

At all events, if the nations of the two Americas can combine to intervene in the affairs of a turbulent neighbor, how much more can the non-combatant nations of the world, who also have suffered by the war, who also share in the destiny of the world, assert their claim to insist that the treaty of peace be drawn up neither in satisfaction of individual vengeance nor in support of an artificial balance of power, but in accordance with the principle of nationalities.—H. G. DWIGHT.

How shall we preserve the supremacy of virtue and the soundness of the common judgment? How shall we buttress Democracy? The peril of this nation is not in any foreign foe! We, the people, are its power, its peril, and its hope!—CHARLES E. HUGHES.

The first motive which ought to impel us to study is the desire to augment the excellence of our nature, and to render an intelligent being yet more intelligent.
 —MONTESQUIEU.